

12 September 1953

MEMORANDUM FOR THE FILE

SUBJECT: Discussion with Alfreds Berzins regarding Mikhail S. Vetrov

1. On 9 September 1953 the undersigned proceeded to New York where he met Alfreds Berzins, former Latvian Minister of the Interior and Public Affairs. The purpose of the meeting was to clarify Berzins' former relationship with Vetrov and to determine to what extent Berzins would be willing to collaborate in a defection attempt should such attempt prove at all feasible.

2. Regarding his past relationship with Vetrov, Berzins related that Vetrov arrived in Riga as the First Secretary of the Russian Embassy in 1935 or 1936. As a result of normal diplomatic social and semi-official functions, Berzins became fairly well acquainted with Vetrov to the extent that both of them attended hunting parties and similar functions bordering more on purely social activities rather than the usual semi-official/social functions. In these meetings — which Berzins indicated were quite frequent — Vetrov seemed to seek out Berzins' companionship apparently because the latter speaks flawless Russian and — as the undersigned well knows — because Berzins is an exceptionally good conversationalist and has always been well versed in international topics. In these meetings Berzins never experienced any friction or animosity between himself and Vetrov. Berzins recalls that at times Vetrov was accompanied by a woman who could have possibly been his wife. Berzins is not too certain on this point because he stated that members of Soviet diplomatic as well as other missions located outside of the Iron Curtain have often been assigned trusted and cleared female personnel who often acted and were known as the wives of various members. Although Berzins has no definite proof he assumes that the woman who at times accompanied Vetrov was assigned rather than married to him. The following is Berzins' description of this woman: Small build; bony structure, elongated face coming to a distinct sharp point at the chin; dark hair; dark complexioned; did not appear to look Jewish but rather Slavic without the prominent cheek bones that are so common among Slavs. Berzins had no further knowledge of any wife or child of Vetrov's.

3. Unhesitatingly and emphatically Berzins indicated that Vetrov would recognize him immediately and vice versa. Moreover, Berzins felt that if his name were mentioned to Vetrov either in writing or verbally Vetrov should recognize it immediately, although he hastened to add that in order to recall to Vetrov's mind the circumstances surrounding their previous relationship, it would be wise if his previous title were mentioned along with his name.



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4. Subsequent to the Russian invasion of Latvia in the middle of June 1940 Berzins, fearing arrest and possible deportation or death, hid out in a farm house having previously discussed the advantage or disadvantage of hiding with his successor, Peters Blauss. Blauss, it should be noted, had never been a Communist and had, previous to the Russian occupation, worked as a department director in Berzins' ministry. Shortly after the Russian occupation Blauss was named as Minister succeeding Berzins and still feeling loyal towards Berzins kept him advised of the Russian sentiments regarding Berzins personally. On 29 June 1940, Blauss came to the farm house where Berzins was hiding and informed him that Vetrov would like to see him. Berzins' obvious fear was countered by Blauss who stated that he did not think that the matter was very serious and felt that Vetrov just wanted to talk to Berzins. On the strength of Blauss' belief, Berzins agreed to meet Vetrov, the meeting site having been previously chosen by Vetrov at some secluded rural spot. Armed with a pistol Berzins proceeded to the spot by automobile but failed to meet Vetrov because his arrival was delayed due to a flat tire. Consequently Berzins proceeded to Riga where he found Blauss and informed him of the reasons for his delay. Blauss then contacted Vetrov who arranged an alternate meeting place and gave some address on Slokas Street in Riga where Berzins was to appear at 10 p.m. on 29 June. Upon arriving at this address Berzins entered an apartment on the 5th floor, and noticed that the apartment had a name plate which indicated that it was the residence of one Ihuu Jemeljanov. Berzins states that there was one Jemeljanov who was associated with the Russian News Agency, TASS, and who later became the Chief of Protocol of the Russian dominated foreign ministry in Latvia. Berzins was admitted to the apartment by Vetrov and found another individual present whom he assumed to be Jemeljanov although he has no reason to be certain that this man was Jemeljanov. During the next two hours Vetrov attempted to elicit information from Berzins regarding a secret pact which Latvia supposedly signed with Germany. Berzins disclaimed any knowledge of such pact and advised Vetrov to seek such information from either the former Latvian Foreign Minister, Munters, or the President himself, Ulmanis. Vetrov continued to insist that there was such a pact and requested Berzins to sign a statement to the effect that such a pact had been concluded between Latvia and Germany. Berzins kept insisting that he had no knowledge of such a pact and refused to sign any such statement for a period of 2 hours at which time Vetrov informed him that he would let Berzins think this matter over and would expect him at this same apartment the following evening, 30 June 1940, at 10 p.m.

5. When Berzins arrived at the prescribed time and place on the following day he found Vetrov imbibiated and in a fairly antagonistic mood. No other individual was present on this occasion. Vetrov again insisted that Berzins sign a statement and Berzins again refused on the grounds that he had no knowledge of such a pact. This resulted in threats from Vetrov to which Berzins point blank asked Vetrov whether Berzins was

speaking to a representative of Soviet Russia or the Chief of the local NKVD. Apparently such a firm stand on Berzins' part brought a change in attitude in Vetrov who replied that Berzins was speaking to a representative of the peoples of Soviet Russia. This second meeting lasted for a period of 2 hours whereupon Vetrov again told Berzins he would give him until the following day at 10 p.m. to think the matter over. Berzins however replied that he had other commitments for that evening and for several days hence and could not see Vetrov -- to which Vetrov queried when Berzins could see him again. A meeting was set for one week from that date at 10 p.m. at the same apartment.

6. The following day, 1 July 1940, Berzins related the entire incident to the former Latvian President, Ulmanis, who at that time was still living unmolested although under guard, in his former residence, the Riga Castle. Ulmanis -- according to Berzins -- advised Berzins to leave the country which was in contradiction to his previous order to all officials of his government that they "stay in their places just as he would remain in his place." Having bid farewell to Ulmanis and then to his wife and son, Berzins departed from Latvia and finally arrived in Finland via Estonia.

7. During the undersigned's conversation with Bersins he completely failed to mention any tie that he knows of between Vetrov and Beria. On the contrary, Bersins is quite certain that Vetrov is a protege of Vichinsky for whom Vetrov paved the way in Latvia so that Vichinsky could move in after the Russians forcibly entered that country and proceed with his plans for annexation. Moreover, Bersins feels that as long as Vetrov believes Vichinsky to be in a stable position in the Soviet hierarchy that an attempt at defection would probably be valueless. Nevertheless the possibility does exist, Bersins feels, that Vetrov could be led to believe that Vichinsky's position is far from stable and that with it would also come Vetrov's downfall.

8. From the above it appears obvious that an attempt to defect Vetrov stemming from Berzins could not be construed by Vetrov as a return favor. However, the possibility does exist to turn such an attempt into a gesture of returning a favor. This could be done by Berzins expressing gratitude for Vetrov having granted him one week to make good his escape. In any case, Berzins reiterated his offer to the undersigned that he is prepared to help the fight against communism at any time and at any place.

6. In conclusion Bersins mentioned that a Mr. Kuniholm and a Mr. Porter would most probably be well acquainted with Vetrov. Both of these individuals had been members of the U.S. diplomatic corps in Riga prior to 1940. Bersins claims that they were members of a well organized and very effective U.S. intelligence group which had contact with the Intelligence Section of the Latvian Army. Bersins identified Kuniholm as presently residing in New York and working for Admiral Stevens organization; he has lunch with Kuniholm on occasion. Regarding Porter, Bersins stated that he lives in Washington and that he has his address at home. He promised to send Porter's address to the undersigned. Bersins does not know Porter's present employer nor anything else about him.

SECURITY INFORMATION